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THOMPSON, E. E.—Critical note on Mr. J. B. Tyrrell's paper, entitled "Catalogue of the Mammalia of Canada exclusive of the Cetacea." Proc. Canada Inst., VII., p. 178, 1889.—Criticism of method of construction.

ALLEN, H.—On the taxonomic values of the wing membranes and of the terminal phalanges of the digits in the Cheiroptera. Proc. A. N. S., Phila., 1889, p. 313, 1890.—Shows that course of nerves in wing membrane can be used in classification.

HORNADAY, W. T.—The extermination of the American bison. Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus., 1886-'87, p. 369-548, 22 pls., 1889.—An exhaustive monograph upon the approaching extinction of *Bison americanus*.

EDITORIAL.

EDITORS, E. D. COPE AND J. S. KINGSLEY.

SENATOR EDMUNDS has introduced into the U. S. Senate a bill appropriating \$500,000 for the endowment of a National University to be located in the city of Washington. It was referred to a committee. This is the outcome of a project which has been long entertained by some of the scientific officials attached to the departments of the government. A good deal may be said both for and contra this proposition. There is reason to doubt, in the first place, whether it is consistent with the character of our government to establish any central institution of this kind. Popular education has been one of the functions especially relegated to the state governments, and although the central government might well retain the power of compelling the former to attend to this important duty, so as not to imperil the welfare of the entire country, it can scarcely assume to create any system or institution of its own. But of course it is competent to establish and sustain such a university in and for the District of Columbia.

At one time the plan was to create the various scientific experts in the employ of the central government professors in the university. We hope that this feature is not embraced in the present bill. The gentlemen in question do not hold office at

present during good behavior, but only during the pleasure of the appointing powers. Changes have been and will be frequently made, and these are not always improvements when considered from the standpoint of merit and competency. Then there is that poison of the official atmosphere of the capital called "departmental courtesy" or "comity." According to this unwritten law, no subordinate of one department, commission or bureau, may indulge in criticism of the acts of any other similar organization without risk of losing his head; and few appointments of persons known to indulge in such criticism, or to entertain opinions unfavorable to the abilities or accomplishments of persons in high positions, are made. This so-called comity is observed between departments, etc., in no way dependent on each other, and in quarters where independence should be expected and even encouraged. The effect of such a state of affairs on the efficiency of expert employees can be easily understood. Incompetency, which should call forth criticism, is shielded, and those who would protect the country from its consequences are muzzled, so far as the government employees and their numerous followers are concerned. It is a lamentable fact that good and otherwise independent men are affected by this false and injurious sentiment after a short residence in the official atmosphere of Washington. The effect on the expert service is necessarily to depreciate it. The inferior men go free, and, sustained by their colleagues, are thus enabled to impose themselves on legislators who are not generally familiar with specialties in science. Thus it has happened that our government and people have been sometimes made ridiculous in the eyes of the learned world..

Under such circumstances the employment of Government servants in responsible positions in a "National University" would prove disastrous. The best men would be sooner or later rotated out of office and inferior men would take their places. The institution would become a by-word among the universities of the country, and nothing would be gained, while much would be lost.

On the whole, the proposition embraced in Senator Edmunds's bill does not impress us favorably.

—In a late number of *Science*, Professor J. P. Lesley criticises our editorial of May on the coming meeting of the International

Congress of Geologists, and makes a number of statements that require notice. He desires to assume the responsibility of the proposition to transfer the meeting of the Congress from Philadelphia to Washington, stating with truth that it was he who introduced the proposition. He also states that in his opinion the meeting would be a failure if held in Philadelphia, and further that Major Powell, director of the U. S. Geological Survey, does not desire the Congress to be held in Washington. His conclusion is that the meeting had better not be held in America at all, but in Europe.

We did not refer to the fact that Prof. Lesley introduced the resolution above mentioned, for the reason that we desired to draw a veil over Prof. Lesley's connection with this matter, for obvious reasons. Now, however, that this gentleman has preceded us in describing his position, we feel no further delicacy in referring to it. Professor Lesley introduced the resolution to change the place of meeting in spite of the opposing representations of the other members of the Philadelphia committee present,—an opposition which has been since emphasized by the issue of a circular protest signed by Leidy, Hunt, Frazer, and Cope, to to which has been added, at his own request, the name of Senor Villanova, the Spanish member of the Bureau. The fact that Professor Lesley's colleagues are opposed to him in his views as to the holding of the Congress in Philadelphia should effectually silence his objections; for these are, we violate no confidence in saying, of a purely personal and most trivial character. That such motives should be permitted to disturb for a moment the Bureau of the International Congress is not to be thought of, although Professor Lesley's disloyalty to Philadelphia and to America may interfere with his usefulness in connection with the Congress when it meets there.

Professor Lesley states that Major Powell does not desire the meeting to be held in Washington. We are glad of it. We hope that it will not be held there, as good reasons for making a change at this late day are wanting. We will, however, observe that Professor Lesley's motion was not carried until one of Major Powell's had been adopted, viz.: that the Congress be not held in Philadelphia. The succeeding motions were mostly made

by Major Powell, and were adopted by the votes of the members and beneficiaries of his survey, while opposing resolutions were voted down by the same persons. It is stated that after the result was reached Major Powell said that he did not desire the meeting of the Congress in Washington. This is quite probable. It is an old political method to profess to desire one thing while in the act of doing another, and persons who have had relations with the present head of the Geological Survey know that he is a thorough master of this kind of diplomacy. Professor Lesley, however, appears to have been taken in by it. We suspect that the Bureau of the Congress will not be taken in, and that they will not be seriously incommoded by these exhibitions which mean nothing but personal idiosyncrasy.

—THE Zoological Congress of Paris of 1889 has formulated a series of rules for the guidance of zoologists in the adoption and use of correct nomenclature. These reaffirm those proposed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science of a half century ago, and those adopted by the American Association at two different periods since that date. They insist, among other things, on the necessity of the presentation of a distinct diagnosis with a new name, in order to secure it recognition. This reaffirmation of the principal bulwark of honest nomenclature should serve as a hint to the American Ornithologists' Union to revise their somewhat ambiguous utterances on this subject; which savor more of the antiquarian than of the scientist.

—THE Zoological Society of Philadelphia has recently added some rare animals to its collection. The wolverine has been very seldom seen in confinement, and the possession of two specimens is a piece of good fortune on which the Society and superintendent are to be congratulated. The greatest novelties known have been in the department of reptiles, where a number of rare species from Florida and Arizona have been exhibited for the first time. Two new species have been received, and have been described by Superintendent Brown. They are the *Eutania nigrilateralis*, from Arizona, and a new genus of Calamarian snakes from Florida. The latter is the most noteworthy addition which has been made to North American herpetology for several years.